



REGION 6 REGIONAL RESPONSE TEAM (RRT) SEMI - ANNUAL REPORT

Period: July, 2002 – December, 2002

I. MAJOR ACTIVITIES

Major/Noteworthy Activities

Homeland Security

On November 19, 2002, President Bush's long debated and negotiations between the White House and Congress passed the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) bill. The bill was signed into law on November 25, 2002. The DHS will provide for greater accountability and unity of purpose for homeland security matters.

The Coast Guard, as one of 22 existing federal agencies transferring to the new Department, will contribute 26% of the new Department's personnel and make up 19% of its total budget. Coast Guard will move to the new department intact as a distinct entity and will retain its military, Multi-mission and Maritime qualities.

SONS Update

The Gulf of Mexico, Spill of National Significance (SONS) exercise, scheduled to be held during the week of 24 – 28 September, 2001, was cancelled due to the terrorist attack of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. The 2002 SONS exercise was conducted on Tuesday, April 23 through Thursday, April 25, 2002 at the Louisiana Superdome in New Orleans.

In preparation for the SONS, three incident specific tabletop exercises were held earlier in 2002 at the field level to provide the incident specific information necessary for the second operational period, the National Incident Command (NIC) level exercise. The SONS exercise was designed to ensure that NIC level issues surfaced were discussed and acted upon by key Federal and State agencies, industry.

Using a facilitated process, drill participants were provided the background on the spill scenario and response efforts through presentations, news broadcasts and briefings from the Marine Safety Offices (MSO), Regional Response Team (RRT) and NIC representatives.

The exercise objectives defined the roles, responsibilities and authorities of the NIC, evaluate and verify the NIC staff standard operating procedures. Among the tasks listed under these objectives was the development of a framework for an operating guide for the NIC.

The authority of the NIC was successfully tested during the exercise particularly through an issue that was raised as an action item: the NIC statutory authority for redirecting privately owned or contracted oil spill response resources, as well as, any resultant liability the NIC might have for the reallocation of these resources.

Tropical Storm Isidore/hurricane Lili

Our region made history on September 25, 2002 when Tropical Storm Isidore threatened our region. For the first time FEMA activated the Eighth Coast Guard District to staff its Regional Operation Center (ROC), Emergency Response Team – Advanced (ERT-A), and Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA) Team under the Stafford Act's Emergency Support Function 10 (ESF-10).

ESF-10 is the FEMA Support Function for Hazardous Materials in which the EPA serves as Regional Chair and in the event that an incident involves both EPA and Coast Guard jurisdictions, EPA is the ESF-10 Chair, with the Coast Guard serving as Vice-Chair.

Shortly after TS Isidore passed through the area, two RNA teams were deployed to assess potential damage to coastal oil & chemical facilities. Although a Disaster was declared for more than 20 southeastern parishes of Louisiana, the RNA teams noted no damage to petrochemical facilities in the affected area and were released from FEMA September 27, 2002.

A week later, we were faced with Hurricane Lili and on October 1, 2002, FEMA once again activated EPA and Coast Guard under ESF-10. Having assessed the potential destruction of this category 4 Hurricane, ERT-A requested FEMA activate and pre-deploy the CG Atlantic Area Incident Management Assist Team (IMAT) and Gulf Strike Team (GST) to the area.

This request and approval of pre-deployment was also history making. These teams were pre-deployed on October 3, 2002 and awaited landfall of Hurricane Lili. Thankfully, Hurricane Lili lost strength prior to landfall and the potential widespread destruction was reduced. There was significant damage to the petrochemical and commercial transportation industry in the affected areas.

Several Oil platforms and Rigs throughout South Central and South Western Louisiana were damaged and some were destroyed. Debris from the Hurricane did result in the need to close a portion of the Gulf Inter-coastal Waterway in MSO Morgan City's zone until the waterway was inspected and declared safe to navigate.

The IMAT was demobilized on October 4, while the GST participated in various RN assessments and demobilized the following day.

The RNA team along with Marine Safety Offices New Orleans and Morgan City identified the parishes of Plaquemines, Iberia, and Orleans having been impacted by the releases of hazardous substances. An action request form (ARF) was completed by the ERT and submitted to FEMA via the State of Louisiana.

Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality made the determination that the releases that were identified were not a priority nor emergency warranting a request for a FEMA Mission Assignment.

EPA and USCG responded to these threats as required under the NCP and as directed by their respective FOSC's in that particular jurisdiction. EPA and USCG identified no other outstanding issues and were authorized to demobilize on Sunday, October 6, 2002.

Marine Safety Office, Morgan City, LA

On April 6, 2002, at approximately 0330 hours, a drop in pressure of a 24" BP CAM pipeline was identified. Upon confirmation of oil in the water, BP contacted both the NRC and Coast Guard. Marine Safety Office, Morgan City responded to the call as the Federal On-Scene Coordinator (FOSC). At approximately 0800, an early-morning Coast Guard over-flight confirmed oil was in the water.

BP estimated that approximately 2,000 barrels of crude oil had been released. An immediate deployment of shallow water barges, skimmers and approximately 40,000 feet of boom was sent to the area where oil was sited. A unified Command was established between USCG, State of Louisiana and BP Pipeline. BP helicopters directed clean-up efforts continued throughout the day and responses efforts.

Approximately 105 personnel, 37 boats, 9 skimmers responded and deployed to the oil spill. NOAA (SSC) estimated that 40% of the crude oil evaporated along with the removal of 160 barrels via mechanical operations. It was reported that approximately 8 miles of coastline/marchland were impacted. As a precautionary measure, a wildlife-cleaning unit was brought to the staging area to be used as required.

There was no threaten or endangered wildlife species impact. Divers capped the pipeline and cleanup operations were halted at 1530 hours due to bad weather. The following day, MSO Morgan City requested that the RRT be convened to an incident specific discussion on the utilization of baggasse as a mitigation tool. Cleanup operations were concluded on the 17th of April 2002.

Marine Safety Office, Mobile, AL

Marine Safety Office, Mobile, AL. and CITGO Oil will be conducting a major exercise on February 4-6, 2003, in Niceville, FL. The exercise started as a PREP (Government Led), than was combined with a FEMA funded CHER CAP (HAZMAT) exercise with the Northern Florida LEPIC.

All key stakeholders involved agreed that a Weapon Of Mass Destruction incident should be part of the exercise where terrorist caused a pollution incident. The CITGO incident (oil related) will be used as a diversion for the main target, Eglin Air Force Base.

Eglin AFB will stand up its own command post to protect the base; direct evacuation within the base due to the Anhydrous Ammonia flumes and also to respond to the oil spilled which will impact their shoreline. A separate command post will be set at the Niceville Community Center for Coast Guard, CITGO, FBI, State and County emergency management agencies to manage activities outside Eglin AFB.

We are fortunate that all key agencies involved have agreed on having one main command post in one organization with a large Unified Command. Through the planning, all agencies have emphasized the "bottom up" approach, which would bring resources to support and augment local system.

MEXUS Plan Update

On May 29-30, 2002, an Area Exercise was conducted for that involved several organizations from the United States and Mexico. Unocal's spill management team based in Sugar Land, Texas, served as the Responsible Party organization during the exercise. The purpose of the exercise was to test the spill management team's effectiveness in dealing with an oil spill scenario that involved the MEXUS Plan and Gulf Annex.

The exercise was designed to satisfy response exercise requirements listed in 30 CFR 254.42 and the National Preparedness for Response Exercise Program (NPREP)

On May 29th, the exercise was started at 1:00 PM and continued in real time with approximately 250 participants including representatives from the United States, Mexico, State of Texas, UNOCAL Spill Management Team, ERST/OBRIENS, and J. Connor Consulting. The exercise was concluded on May 30th at 1700. On May 31st, a critique was held that identified areas that provided opportunities for improvement and areas that did well.

On May 29th, the Day 13 scenario began with the transition into the Forward Command Post at the Bahia Mar Resort in South Padre Island, TX. Over 250 personnel from Mexico and United States were participating in the exercise at the Bahia Mar Resort. At 1:00 PM, key personnel were provided with a Day 13 IAP that contained simulated information to assist them in preparing an IAP for Day 14.

A new trajectory analysis forecasted the remaining oil, approximately 2300 barrels of emulsified product, posed an eminent threat to shoreline impact within 5-7 days. This revised trajectory triggered various notifications to the State of Texas and Country of Mexico, and brought attention to shoreline protection strategies and potential wildlife issues.

On May 30th, play consisted of the spill management team exercise in the Forward Command Post and an Equipment Deployment Exercise offshore along the Mexico and United States border. The Forward Command Post exercise consisted of implementing the Day 14 and development of Day 15 IAP.

Areas of concentration for Day 14 were 'How Clean is Clean,' 'Disposal Plan with regards to Border Issues,' 'Trans-boundary movement of equipment and personnel,' 'Removal of Potential Hazardous Material Drums,' and 'Joint Development of an Incident Action Plan.'

The Equipment Deployment Exercise consisted of an Airborne Support Inc. (ASI) Dispersant Aircraft spraying water (simulated dispersant) on a simulated slick of oil in Mexican waters. The dispersant operations were flawless and proved that the ASI aircraft could fly over 150 to 200 miles offshore to conduct dispersant operations.

The dispersant operations took place at approximately Latitude 25° 55' N and Longitude 094° 50' W in Mexican waters. In addition, two Mexican Naval vessels and one U. S. Coast Guard cutter were equipped with skimming devices and simulated the skimming of oil by successfully retrieving floating cotton seed hulls in the skimming devices.

The overall team performed extremely well and exhibited substantial adaptability to the Incident Command System (ICS). The exercise was the first in which the United States Coast Guard and Mexican Navy participated in a joint exercise utilizing ICS.

The Mexican Navy, with little training, adapted well to the management system. They rapidly organized into an effective ICS organization and utilized their Spanish Incident Management Handbooks in the performance of their duties. All pertinent issues were identified and addressed in appropriate strategies developed by the team.

USEPA E-Plan Update

The E-Plan is a highly secure; Internet based emergency management information system designed for use by first responders. The system was developed in 2000 through a cooperative agreement between EPA Region 6, The Texas Council on Environmental Quality, and the University of Texas at Dallas, with significant contributions from many RRT6 agencies and the RRT VI Industry Work Group.

The initial pilot deployment of the system was in Corpus Christi, TX in 2001. During 2002, the system was expanded to include Iberville Parrish, LA, and Plano, Richardson, Frisco, McKinney, and Houston, TX, and Union and Columbia Counties in Arkansas.

At the close of 2002, E-Plan had over 400 trained users, and contained records for over 6,000 facilities. Efforts also began in 2002 to develop functional linkages between E-Plan, ACP's, and FRPs. The program will continue to be expanded during 2003.

Texas Railroad Commission Update

The Railroad Commission (RRC) created the Office of Safety and Security (OSS) in April 2002. The OSS was created to manage the Commission's Responsibilities in the areas of:

1. Safety and security of employees,
2. Management of risks associated with Commission assets,
3. Development and maintenance of disaster recovery and business Contingency plan,
4. Representation to the State Office of Risk Management,
5. Primary liaison with the Division of Emergency Management,
6. Liaison with outside law enforcement,
7. Liaison with emergency response agencies, and
8. Liaison involving any matters relating to homeland security.

The OSS Director is a member of the State Agency Operations Group, which through the Office of the Governor, is tasked with coordinating Homeland Security issues for Texas' State Agencies.

Current activities also include preparing for active participation in the Texas Department Of Public Safety Division of Emergency Management's Threat Analysis Center. This Center will be an all-source information center to analyze threats to critical infrastructure.

The OSS Training Supervisor is responsible for the development and coordination of safety training for the RRC. This includes scheduling and arranging hazardous materials training and/or other specialized training that may be required for RRC field inspectors.

In addition, the RRC has recently implemented a Voluntary Cleanup Program, where persons such as landowners or developers who have not caused or contributed to oil field pollution can voluntarily enter the program, conduct the cleanup under RRC oversight, and receive a release of liability from the state after successful cleanup.

This program compliments the existing "orphaned" site cleanup program that continues to cleanup abandoned oil field pollution sites with state managed funds.

Exercises / Workshops

Information incorporated in SECTION “A”.

Committee and Working Group Updates

Region 6 Regional Response Team Work Group was convened to deal with issues related to the implementation of the Interagency Memorandum of Agreement Regarding Oil Spill Planning and Response Activities Under the Federal Water Pollution Control Act's National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan and the Endangered Species Act.

The Work Group has prepared a brief worksheet for use by On-Scene Coordinators during the course of a response action that will provide much needed documentation if Endangered Species Act Section 7 consultation becomes required. Additionally, the form works as an ongoing worksheet to track recommendations made by the Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service to protect fish and wildlife and their habitats.

The Work Group still needs to coordinate programmatic consultations for Area Contingency Plans and Inland Plans. This objective will be recommended to the Region 6 Regional Response Team at the 2003 winter meeting.

On September 9, 2002, the RRT VI, Dispersant Subcommittee (Dr. Karolien Debusschere, State of Louisiana) held a conference call to discuss the development and to recommend a plan of action for pursuing the potential expedited approval process for near-shore dispersant use. The subcommittee agreed to:

- Recommend the development of a dispersant expedited approval process to the RRT.
- Limit the development of the expedited approval process to the coastal near-shore area (seaward of the Barrier Islands) only.
- Structure the approval process in a similar manner as the current “RRT VI FOSC Pre-Approval Guidelines and Checklist” to maximize familiarity with the document.

This DRAFT document will be presented to the RRT at the winter meeting in San Antonio, TX.

II. GENERAL PREPAREDNESS AND CONTINGENCY PLANNING

A. TRAINING

Minerals Management Service

MMS will hold the International Offshore Pipeline Workshop on February 26-28, 2003. MMS will co-host the workshop with the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), Research and Special Programs Administration, Office of Pipeline Safety. The workshop is also supported by major oil and gas companies, offshore pipeline contractors, offshore service companies, and other related entities.

The objective of the workshop is to bring together worldwide experience in operating and regulating offshore oil and gas activities in order to identify/disseminate pipeline issues and knowledge for continued safe and pollution free operations.

The workshop will start at 8 AM and end at 5 PM on the first two days. The third day will be a half-day with hours from 8:30 AM to noon. It will be held at the New Orleans Marriott Hotel, 555 Canal Street, New Orleans, Louisiana 70130, U.S.A.

The workshop, through its keynote addresses, theme presentations, working groups and networking will share worldwide pipeline operating knowledge and identify what critical pipeline issues still need to be addressed. The workshop is structured to allow maximum interface among industry experts and general attendees to discuss major issues that affect the offshore pipeline industry worldwide.

This will be accomplished by breaking out the attendees into various Working Groups to facilitate parallel discussions of all major industry issues. Working groups will be further broken down into sub-groups to maximize the coverage of major issues.

This will allow individual attendees ample opportunity to provide their input and insights to actively participate in workgroup discussion. Participation will include international pipeline interest from the following: Government Agencies, Oil and Gas Industry, Consulting Firms, Construction Contractors, Fabrication Contractors, Manufacturers, Academic and Research Institutions, Other Related Entities

Voss Deployment Training in Kentucky

The Coast Guard (D8) conducted a training exercise, August 6 – 8, 2002, utilizing its VOSS (Vessel of Opportunity Skimming System) in the MSO Paducah, Kentucky AOR. Major participants in this exercise were USCG, (Gulf and Atlantic Strike Teams), CGC CIMARRON, USEPA, Kentucky Department of Water Quality, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, Ingram Barge Company, and Hyde Marine Corp.

The decision was made that a single-sided deployment of the VOSS would be undertaken, with one section of the outrigger arm, flex-boom, and the skimmer deployed on the starboard side. Simulated oil product would be pumped into a 1,000-gallon poly tank on the bow of the vessel.

Simultaneous with the skimming operations, the Oil Spill Flow Diverter (OSFD) was deployed in a towed arrangement behind a 21 ft. utility boat to attempt to divert the simulated oil product (rice hulls) toward the skimmer.

The OSFD may not be an effective tool for steering or herding oil unless there sufficient current to operate it from shore, or unless a sufficiently powered small boat is available to tow it. It is planned to continue to deploy and work with the OSFD and other emerging technologies.

Area Contingency Plans (ACP)

On January 25, 2002, all coastal Marine Safety Offices planners met at MSO Houston, to discuss how all Coast Guard ACP's (coastal) can be aligned to mirror the "ONE TEXAS PLAN", which is now called the "ONE GULF PLAN".

All of the TEXAS ACP's belonged to the Texas Plan. Louisiana and Alabama MSOs were asked to align their plans with the Texas Plan, which was agreed upon. Funding was requested via Coast Guard Headquarter to assist in finding outside ACP technical support to insure that boilerplate data is consistent throughout the Gulf of Mexico region.

Approximately \$25,000.00 of Coast Guard funding has been obligated to assist in developing the One Gulf Plan. A contract was awarded to the O'Brien Group to work with MSO and state (Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama) planning officials to insure that the plan meets the required USCG, state and local geographic specific data.

The finalized plan will conform to the USCG Headquarters (G-M) national standard and will offer consistency throughout the Six Coastal MSOs. The plan will be structured to align with the Incident Command System (ICS). The plan shall be designed to allow flexibility for revisions, automatic numbering and style headings, easily created table of contents, and the ease of future changes.

The plan shall automatically renumber, repaginate, and update the table of contents as changes occur. The design shall allow additions of future Headquarters Office of Response (G-MOR) language for national policy sections and eliminate duplicate creation.

III. PERSONNEL CHANGES

Mr. Glenn Sekavec, Regional Environmental Officer, Albuquerque, New Mexico, and the U.S. Department of the Interior's Region 6 Regional Response Team (RRT) representative since the early 1990's, retired on January 3, 2003.

His counsel to the RRT will be missed and we wish him well. In his place, Dr. Stephen R. Spencer will be Acting Regional Environmental Officer until a new Regional Environmental Officer is named and will also represent the Department on the Region 6 Regional Response Team.

In October 2002, Jim Staves who had served as EPA's alternate RRT Co-Chair for 12 years was reassigned to the University of Texas at Dallas, as the Director of their newly created Emergency Preparedness Center for a period of two years. Ragan Broyles, Deputy Branch Chief of the Response and Prevention Branch was designated as the new Alternate Co-Chair.

LCDR Michael Devany, DOC (NOAA) has replaced CDR Jim Morris as the primary member to RRT VI.

IV. NEXT REGION 6 RRT MEETING

The winter RRT VI meeting (USCG) will be held in San Antonio, TX on 29-30 January 2003.

The summer, RRT VI meeting (EPA) has been tentatively scheduled, for 17-19 June 2003.

The location is the Holiday Inn in Fort Smith. Additional meeting information will be provided as it becomes available.